Ballast Water Management in the Baltic Sea

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Abstract

The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), comprising of nine Baltic Sea countries and the European Union, is working to protect the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution, including biological pollution from alien species. HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, signed by Contracting States’ environment ministers and EU, includes a Road Map for harmonized implementation and ratification of the International Convention for Control and Management of Ships’ Ballast Water and Sediments, with an overall aim of all Baltic Sea countries ratifying the Convention latest in 2013.

HELCOM has compiled information on the alien species present in the Baltic Sea and species that might still invade from other sea regions, possibly impairing or damaging the environment, human health, property or resources.

The HELCOM MARITIME Group has decided in its 8th meeting (2009) that Ballast Water Exchange is not a suitable management option for intra-Baltic shipping, and the Baltic Community has taken action with OSPAR Commission to promote voluntary exchange of ballast water outside the Baltic Sea and in OSPAR areas meeting the Convention requirements.

Further HELCOM work will focus on how to assess risks related on intra-Baltic voyages, and on following developments of ballast water treatment technologies suitable for the small and semi-enclosed Baltic Sea.

Key words: Helsinki Commission, Ballast Water, Management, Alien Species, Shipping, Ballast Water Management Convention

1 Introduction

1.1 Helsinki Commission

For more than three decades, the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, more usually referred to as the Helsinki Commission or HELCOM, has been acting as the main environmental policy-maker for the Baltic Sea area by developing specific measures to protect and conserve its unique marine environment. The Helsinki Commission, working through intergovernmental co-operation between all the nine

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Baltic Sea coastal countries (Figure 1) and the European Union, has achieved many environmental objectives in the course of the past 30 years, thus validating the belief that the deterioration of the environmental status of one of the most polluted seas in the world can be arrested and the state of the sea improved.

Figure 1. Map of the HELCOM area and the Baltic Sea basins. (Source: HELCOM)

HELCOM is the governing body of the “Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area” (Helsinki Convention), which has been signed by all the Baltic Sea coastal countries already in 1974, and further amended in 1992. It is the first international agreement in the world to cover all sources of pollution,